

VZCZCXRO7818
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #1545/01 2010621
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 200621Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0301
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW PRIORITY 0455
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ PRIORITY 0456
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 7435

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001545

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/18/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR'S END OF TOUR OBSERVATIONS

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Classified by Ambassador Campbell for Reasons 1.4 b. and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: In Africa, Nigeria has been indispensable to the U.S. It supplies a growing percentage of our oil and gas, is the site of our second largest investment on the continent (albeit almost solely in oil and gas), and, with up to one-quarter of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, it has the heft to partner with us on multiple regional and international issues. The non-official links are also close and most Nigerians remain pro-American. Nevertheless, Islamic radicalism is present in the impoverished North, and militant activity in the Delta directly threatens U.S. strategic interests. There follows end-of-tour observations about where the Yar'Adua administration may be headed and how we may continue to encourage Nigeria's political and economic evolution so that it can better shoulder responsibilities congruent with its size, wealth and potential. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Nigeria was cobbled together by the British out of disparate tribes and cultures only a century ago. The Macmillan government made a conscious decision not to divide the country into smaller, more "rational" states at independence in 1960. Since then, the "Nigeria experiment" (as the elites like to call it) -- the vision of a huge nation of numerous tribes and religions united by democracy, pursuit of economic development, governance according to the rule of law and playing a major role on the world stage - has been embraced as the national aspiration and as a focus for a common identity. Though democracy as the national ideal has persisted through coups, civil war, and military rule, commitment to its implementation by the political classes has been variable and incomplete. Much of the population is probably poorer now than it was at independence, despite riches from oil and gas; conventionally this sorry state is ascribed to economic mismanagement and military rule. But, Nigeria has also seen its population expand faster than its non-petrochemical resources, despite its heavy disease burden and one of the shortest average life spans in the world outside war zones.

¶3. (C) Since the end of military rule in 1998, Nigeria has had three elections, each less credible than its predecessor. In the run up to the 2007 elections, all the major political parties violated their internal rules and procedures, and there was little or no pretense of a broad based political process leading to the selection of party nominees. President Obasanjo selected Umaru Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan as the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential and vice presidential candidates without much consultation, and he persuaded or coerced rival aspirants to withdraw. Bribery, intimidation and violence were widespread

throughout the nominating and campaigning process, involving all the parties. Actual voter turnout, as opposed to International National Elections Commission (INEC) reports, was abysmal, and in too many places there was little relationship between votes cast and results announced by INEC.

14. (U) In the aftermath, Nigeria looks to be well on its way to becoming a one-party state, though without any integrated party political principles, platform or charismatic leader, and with ex-President Obasanjo the party leader for life. (The formal title is Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the PDP.) The extent to which the ex-President will withdraw from active exercise of power under his successor, President Yar'Adua, remains an open question.

15. (C) Nevertheless, during President Obasanjo's eight-year administration, military in style in so many ways, a democratic culture did continue to develop, if by fits and starts. Three elections, no matter how bad they were, seem to have established the principle that regimes in Nigeria change through at least the pretence of elections rather than by military coup and May 29 marked Nigeria's first transition from one civilian president to another. Defeat of President Obasanjo's Third Term aspirations confirmed the maxim that there are no Nigerian presidents for life, even if it remains to be seen whether there will be a ruling party leader for life.

16. (C) The 2007 presidential transition endorsed the principle of alternation between a Northern and Southern Presidency, probably enhancing political stability. The judiciary showed the potential, if not always the reality, of independence from the executive, especially at its upper reaches. That trend has been strengthened since President Yar'Adua's inauguration by the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of Peter Obi in Anambra state against the wishes of Obasanjo's circle, and by the President ordering the ruling PRIORITyly to be enforced. A year earlier, in May 2006, the National Assembly asserted its prerogatives and blocked President Obasanjo's

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efforts to amend the constitution so that he could run for a third term. At the Villa, the conduct of business by President Obasanjo acquired a certain orderly patina congruent with playing by the rules. There were weekly cabinet meetings that discussed real issues in place of the secret deliberations of the Armed Forces Ruling Council. Though gender relations in Nigeria are more problematic than appearances suggest, President Obasanjo appointed more women to more powerful government positions than any of his predecessors. And there was significant growth in official transparency, the publication of the Federal government's monthly financial allocation to each of the states being but one example. (However, we cannot confirm that the amount the Federal government says it disburses is actually received by the states, not least because of the lack of transparency in Nigeria's fiscal arrangements.)

17. (C) President Yar'Adua's personal political direction remains unclear. He is Nigeria's first university graduate head of state and the first civilian in more than twenty years (leaving aside the brief Shonkan interregnum). There are seeming contradictions in his background and makeup. He is a Muslim who has never visited the U.S. and was the second state governor to institute Sharia law. But, as a young man, he showed Marxist proclivities despite his Northern grandee origins, and he was not a political ally of his brother, the venerated Shehu Yar'Adua. In Katsina, he demonstrated a stubborn, remote, passive bent and the word on the street is that his cooperation with the deputy governor and the state legislature was poor. Yet, especially by the usual standards of Nigerian political life, he is free of the odor of corruption. He personally is rich, as he revealed when he made public his assets, the first Nigerian chief of state to do so. He has not demonstrated overweening ambition and there is credible evidence that President Obasanjo forced the presidency on him. He continues to be surrounded by many of those prominent in the previous administration. The heads of the various security services and the military remain the former President's picks. He has yet to put his personal stamp on the new government. That may change soon as cabinet positions are filled.

18. (C) On the other hand, President Yar'Adua's inaugural address

acknowledged the shortcomings of the elections that brought him to power, and he pledged to continue his predecessor's reform agenda. He has stated that improved relations between the Executive and the National Assembly is a priority, and that he will present to it for endorsement his plan to address the festering situation in the Niger Delta. He is free of personal bombast. By ordering the PRIORITY implementation of the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of Peter Obi he demonstrated active support for the rule of law. (His predecessor ignored Supreme Court rulings he did not like.) His personal style in approaching the first challenge to his administration, a general strike provoked by fuel price increases and other measures introduced by President Obasanjo in his last days in office, demonstrated a willingness to work with his opponents as well as his friends. In short, there is the possibility that President Yar'Adua himself may have a greater disposition toward the rule of law than his predecessor and the political networks that brought him to power. If over the next few months there is convincing evidence that this is so, we may need to distinguish more sharply between Yar'Adua the person and the system that placed him in the presidency, yet over which he has demonstrated to date little control.

¶9. (C) The challenge for us is to support those in Nigeria working toward democracy conducted according to the rule of law and an open economy conducive to economic development while at the same time partnering with the Yar'Adua government on areas of mutual interest, despite its winning power through flawed elections. While engaging with the Yar'Adua government, it will serve our long-term interests to be identified strongly with the pro-democratic, pro-free market elements in Nigerian society, whether to be found in the ruling party or in the opposition.

¶10. (C) As for President Yar'Adua himself, we should do all that we can to encourage him to support the rule of law and democratic institutions - especially since that appears to be his bent. We should continue to encourage him to put his own stamp on his administration. He understands that the credibility of his government is questioned by many Nigerians, and he wants U.S. approval, not least to buttress his position at home. That approval should be forthcoming in response to the positive steps he takes with respect to election reform at home and fulfillment of Nigeria's commitments in other parts of Africa, especially Darfur and Somalia. Given his pro-democracy/rule of law signals and the importance of Nigeria in Darfur and Somalia, it is probably ripe for a low-key, presidential meeting, perhaps in conjunction with President

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Yar'Adua's visit to New York for the UNGA.

¶11. (C) Our engagement with the National Assembly, the courts and various economic, health and education ministries should continue and be intensified. The National Assembly and the increasingly independent judiciary are in many ways driving the development of a democratic culture and look to us for assistance in capacity building. Cabinet departments are foci for our humanitarian assistance ranging from PEPFAR to girl-child education, and for economic development in sectors ranging from cassava to fish to bird flu. They also involve implementing partners drawn from civil society and are important to building at the grass-roots a long-term bilateral relationship. PEPFAR has been a resounding success for U.S. programs and policy in partnership with Nigerian officialdom and civil society, with the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate not increasing and possibly actually declining, raising the possibility that Nigeria may avoid the disease cataclysms of southern Africa. Indeed, his unswerving support for PEPFAR and his efforts to de-stigmatize victims of HIV/AIDS may be judged by history to be President Obasanjo's greatest domestic achievement. PEPFAR must continue as a U.S. priority in Nigeria.

¶12. (C) Similarly, we should continue to move ahead with building the military-to-military relationship, with a particular emphasis on U.S. provision of training opportunities. It is in our own interest that the Nigerian military be more professional with a better understanding of its role in a civilian, democratic polity. And a better trained, better equipped military are essential if Nigeria is to play the regional peacekeeping role that its size and political importance dictates. The current uniformed military leadership may be

less suspicious of U.S. military intentions than its predecessors; it remains to be seen whether a future Minister of Defense in the Yar'Adua government will be a player; under Obasanjo, the Minister was a cipher. While there are likely to be new opportunities, we must proceed with caution, not least because of Northern, Islamic sensitivities.

¶13. (C) The states are now supposed to receive about half of Nigeria's petroleum revenue. Despite these putative riches, many or most are woefully undeveloped in governance and the state and local elections in 2007 were often as bad as the national ones. Our assistance to state assemblies and to lower courts should continue to discriminate between those where we can make a difference and those where our intervention is premature.

¶14. (C) And our Muslim outreach efforts should not flag. Islam in Nigeria is in flux, not least because of the rapid expansion of Christianity. Given the close identification of evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity with the U.S. here, it is imperative that we continue to strengthen our ties with Nigerian Muslims through a variety of exchange programs and maintenance of such ongoing public affairs initiatives as the American Corners. If the North sees President Yar'Adua as genuinely independent of the former President, then a growing official relationship would compliment Muslim outreach. If, however, the North turns against President Yar'Adua as an Obasanjo cats-paw, then our influence in the North is likely to decline as we partner with the Nigerian government on regional or continental issues.

CAMPBELL